

# The Historic Contact in the Northeast National Historic Landmark Theme Study

## An Overview

**T**he papers in this special issue of *CRM* highlight some of the results of the *Historic Contact in the Northeast National Historic Landmark (NHL) Theme Study*, an innovative partnership project coordinated by the National Park Service Northeastern Field Office's Cultural Resource Planning Branch (CRPB) between 1989 and 1993. The project brought together colleagues in federal, state, and local government agencies, Indian tribes, and the professional and private communities in a 17-state area extending along the Atlantic Seaboard between Maine and Virginia. Working together, they developed a framework used to identify, evaluate, and nominate cultural resources documenting contact relations between Indian, European, and African people in the region from the 16th to the 18th centuries. The authors of the papers in this issue represent the full range of this constituency. Through their efforts, and those of the more than 200 specialists who provided information, review comments, and other technical assistance during project development, more than 800 sites and districts associated with contact were studied. Seventeen of these properties were subsequently

designated as National Historic Landmarks for their associations with historic contact.

The project began as the first NHL theme study in 30 years to focus upon archeological resources. Adopting the National Register of Historic Places multiple property documentation format to eliminate needless repetition of information, the theme study became the first NHL project to employ the preservation planning historic context framework as a vehicle to systematically identify, evaluate, and nominate cultural resources on a regional basis.

Several groups played particularly significant roles in the theme study. The State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) in each of the 17 states in the project disseminated project notices and drafts of project products to groups and individuals living or working within their states, relayed responses to CRPB staff, provided information from state site inventories, reviewed all project materials, and assisted in the identification and evaluation of potential NHL nominees. The Archaeological NHL Committee, a joint committee of the Society for American Archaeology and the Society for Historical Archaeology, organized professional peer review of project products and furnished other key technical assistance. And 22 colleagues made especially important contributions by voluntarily serving as nomination sponsors providing information and reviewing documentation for specific NHL properties. Several of these sponsors are authors of the site report papers in this issue of *CRM*.

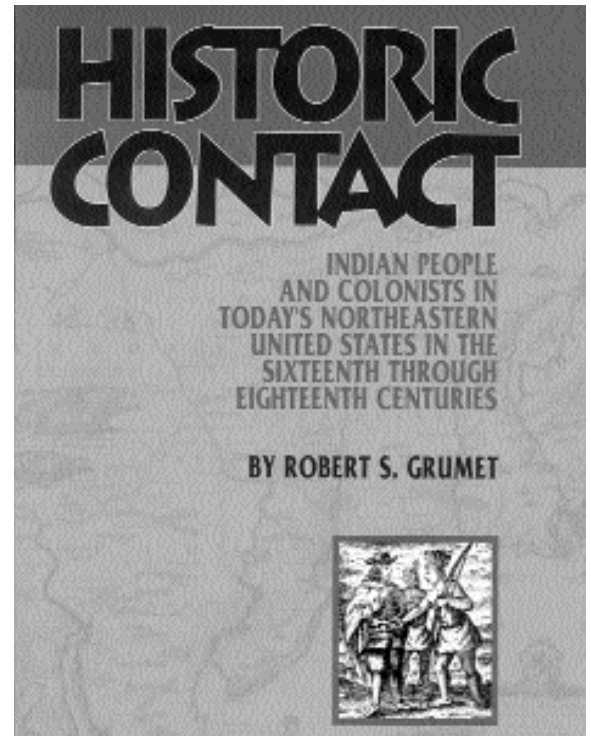
Although the project formally ended with the designation of the last NHL in 1993, project partners continue to work to make the products of theme study research available to a broader public. Two sponsors, Ralph Solecki, for Fort Massapeag, and Herbert Kraft, for the Minisink Historic District, have published articles either reporting on their properties or using revisions of the NHL property nomination form in state archeological society journals. Articles containing adaptations of property nomination forms for four other NHLs designated through the theme study cur-

Woodcut produced for Thomas Campanius Holm in 1702, courtesy The Library Company of Philadelphia.



rently are in press. Project partners have also participated in NHL plaque dedications and other activities to increase public awareness of these nationally significant properties. Many further volunteered time to review chapters and provide other support as the theme study report completed in 1992 was revised for publication. The book resulting from this effort, entitled *Historic Contact: Indian People and Colonists in Today's Northeastern United States in the Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries*, will be published by the University of Oklahoma Press this fall. It will be the first volume in the Press's "Contributions to Public Archeology" series, a new series dedicated to making the findings of CRM research available to wider audiences.

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The NPS also gratefully acknowledges the assistance of David Brose, Shereen Lerner, and the other members of the Archaeological NHL Committee of the Society for American Archaeology and the Society for Historical Archaeology in the development of the Historic Contact theme study. They volunteered many hours of service during 1992 and 1993.

Carol D. Shull

## A National Perspective

The remarkable range and diversity of the localities whose histories are described in the pages of this special issue of *CRM* show how the Historic Contact NHL theme study is an outstanding model for National Historic Landmark theme studies. The results of this project are not only 17 new National Historic Landmark designations but a book, a number of fine articles, and a study that can be used by anyone to evaluate and understand other places relating to contact between Indians, Europeans, and African people and to nominate them to the National Register. Perhaps best of all, the study brought together a variety of experts as partners and tested how we can work with them on identifying and designating National Historic Landmarks

and educating the public about them, not just in this study but in other studies as well. In fact, guest editor Bob Grumet already is at work coordinating a new nation-wide theme study working with many of the partners who helped with the Historic Contact project to document and designate significant sites associated with the Earliest Americans.

The National Historic Landmark Survey was recently merged with the National Register, so that these programs can be administered more consistently and in tandem. The Historic Contact theme study is the first NHL theme study to use the National Register of Historic Places multiple property documentation format. This format has been so heavily used to streamline preparation of National Register nominations that over one third

of the nearly 65,000 listings in the National Register are part of multiple property submissions that, as Bob Grumet says in his introduction, eliminate the needless repetition of information. They also define in a clearly understandable way the kinds of characteristics a resource must have in order to be eligible for designation within a documented context. Right now, we plan for new NHL theme studies to follow this same model and for the multiple property documentation created for these new studies to be made widely available, so that others can use this research to identify additional properties not just for NHL designation but for National Register listing and determinations of eligibility as well. Popular publications will be another product. The National Historic Landmark Survey has several theme studies underway, including one on labor history in cooperation with the Newberry Library and a group of noted scholars, another on places related to the Underground Railroad, and a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation-sponsored study on dams in the United States.

This year we will be considering what the National Park Service can do to facilitate the designation of National Historic Landmarks. Already, we know that we need to develop increasingly more effective guidance to assist those identifying, evaluating, and nominating resources as NHLs and to the National Register. We need to work with interested individuals and organizations to develop some consensus on priorities for studies

and make these known so that the public will support us. We must seek more partnerships with universities, professional organizations, federal agencies, State Historic Preservation Officers, Indian tribes, and others to get these studies done. To the greatest possible extent, outside experts should be used to do these studies, not NPS staff. How can we make better use of National Register listing documentation to minimize the need for additional work? How can we educate the public better about NHLs, some of our nation's premier historic places? **Teaching with Historic Places** lesson plans for use in the schools have been prepared for some of them. Some will be showcased in the new National Register of Historic Places Travel Itinerary series. We are planning a new book on National Historic Landmarks, similar to the recently published *African American Historic Places* volume.

What else should we be doing? How can we do this work cheaper and better? In the coming year, we will be looking to the preservation community for advice on how the NPS can make the NHL program more effective. Projects like the Historic Contact in the Northeast National Historic Landmark Theme Study are one way to achieve this goal. Thank you to everyone who worked so hard to make it happen.

*Carol D. Shull is Chief, National Historic Landmark Survey and Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places.*

Lloyd N. Chapman

## The Most Important Things We Can Do

**T**he *Historic Contact in the Northeast National Historic Landmark Theme Study* was completed as government-wide re-invention directives called upon the National Park Service to re-examine the effectiveness of its programs. The NPS strategic plan lists the following objectives as the "most important things that we can do" to fulfill the agency's mission to preserve and protect the nation's cultural and natural heritage:

- Establish a scientific/scholarly basis for resource management decisions.
- Strengthen protection of park resources.

- Achieve sustainability in all park operations and development.
- Help people forge emotional, intellectual, and recreational ties with their natural and cultural heritage.
- Lead in a national initiative to strengthen the recognition and perpetuation of heritage resources and their public benefits.
- Become a more responsive, efficient, and accountable organization.
- Pursue maximum public benefits through contracts, cooperative agree-